

# Flickr Best Practices Guide for Government

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## Introduction

This guide is written to help government web managers use Flickr effectively. Before you start using Flickr for your agency or program, please consult with your agency web manager and lawyers to determine if your agency has signed an approved Flickr Terms of Service Agreement ([http://forum.webcontent.gov/?page=TOS Flickr](http://forum.webcontent.gov/?page=TOS_Flickr)).

A Flickr Gov group has been established for government users to exchange best practices and help agencies manage their accounts. It is recommended that you join this group. Request to join at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/flickrgov/>.

## **What is Flickr?**

Flickr is an online, global photo sharing and management site owned by Yahoo!. The goals of the site are to allow users to share content and help users organize photos and videos in new ways. According to Flickr, tens of millions of people use Flickr from around the world and it is the most popular stand-alone photo sharing site on the internet.

## **The Flickr Community**

Flickr provides many social features that allow people to share and discuss photography with one another. The Flickr community represents a very broad range of interests and is generally very social and welcoming. To get a feel for the diversity and talent of the Flickr community we recommend visiting The Flickr Blog (<http://blog.flickr.net/en>). Additionally, please see the Flickr Community Guidelines (<http://www.flickr.com/guidelines.gne>).

## **Pricing**

Flickr provides a limited version of its service for free, and a “pro” service for \$24.95 per year. The free account shows the 200 most recently uploaded photos, limits the photo upload size, and allows for limited organization of content. The pro account offers unlimited uploads and storage, as well as greater control over organization and statistics on the account.

The differences between Flickr’s free and pro services are further outlined at <http://www.flickr.com/help/limits/#28>.

## **Questions to ask before using Flickr for your agency or program**

### **Does your agency or program create or own original photography or video?**

Because Flickr is designed to facilitate sharing and management of photo and video content, it is most useful to agencies or programs with missions that involve the creation or consumption of photo or video content. The content your agency shares on Flickr can be created internally (such as photographs of officials or events), or comprised of content it already owns or collects (such as historical photos).

## **Records management**

It is important to consult your agency's records management plan before uploading original content to Flickr. Work with your agency's Records Officer to determine what, if any, requirements exist. Locate your agency's records officer at: <http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/agency/officers-lists.html>.

## **What do you want to achieve on Flickr?**

Identifying objectives for your use of Flickr is an essential first step to developing an effective strategy.

Flickr may be used to achieve any of these objectives:

- Raise awareness of your agency's current activities using photos or video
- Engage an audience in discussion about your content
- Enhance information about existing collections of visual content, such as historic photos
- Allow your audience to easily browse, view, and download your content

Your agency or program may have objectives that are not listed here—the key is to know what you seek to accomplish on Flickr before using it.

## **Who is your audience?**

Once you have established your internal objectives, consider who you are trying to reach by using Flickr.

Answer the following questions to identify your audience:

- Who do you want to reach with your content? (Who do you want to find?)
- Who will be interested in your agency's content? (Who wants to find you?)
- How does your agency benefit from people finding and seeing your content?
- How does your audience benefit from finding and seeing your content?
- Should some of your content be private or restricted to a particular audience?

## **Who will manage your Flickr account?**

There are many ways to use Flickr effectively, but all of them require some degree of management. Depending on your strategy, you may need to dedicate resources to manage any of the following tasks:

- Creating and managing one agency or several sub-agency and program accounts
- Taking pictures and video (content)
- Editing content
- Uploading content
- Organizing content into sets, collections, and groups
- Adding titles, descriptions, tags, and geo data to content
- Moderating comments and notes left on content
- Engaging the Flickr community through groups or leaving comments
- Responding to FlickrMail

Your strategy will determine which of these tasks you will need to manage, and how frequently you will need to carry them out. Also consider the primary account manager's level of familiarity with Flickr and its community dynamics.

## **Best practices**

### **Managing your presence on Flickr**

When creating an account on Flickr for your agency or program, include information on your Flickr profile page that:

- Provides information about your agency or program
- Explains what Flickr users can expect from your agency or program on Flickr
- Demonstrates that your Flickr profile is authentic and official

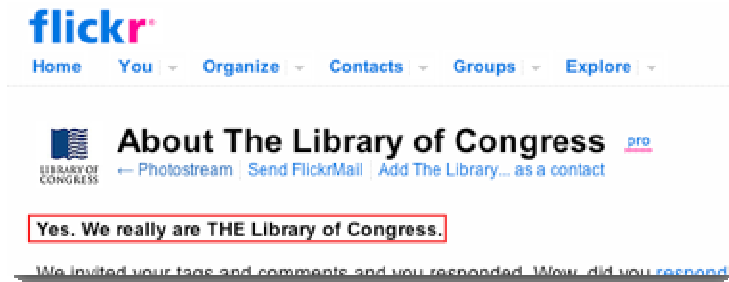
You may also want to include any other relevant information for users, such as image use guidelines or your comment policy.

Best practices to demonstrate authenticity:

- Use a recognized, official and trademarked brand mark as your buddy icon
- Claim authenticity in the information section of your profile page
- Link to your Flickr account from your official dotgov website
- Enter your .gov domain in the website section of your profile page, and consider using the custom HTML in your profile section to create links to your .gov domain

- Enter a .gov email address in the contact section of your profile
- See Social Media Outlet Authentication Best Practices (<http://govsocmed.pbworks.com/Social-Media-Outlet-Authentication-Best-Practices>) for more guidance

The Library of Congress's profile on Flickr provides a great example of how to claim authenticity:



## Managing content on Flickr

Making best use of Flickr's services requires an understanding of the many ways it allows users to organize and describe photo and video content.

### Identifying compelling and useful content

Your agency or program's usage of Flickr to share content is only beneficial if your content is useful. Consider the following when deciding what to share on Flickr:

- Know your audience – what are they interested in seeing?
- Find a representative sample of your content rather than posting and managing all of it
- Be judicious – if you have 30 photos from an event, consider posting only the best five
- Consider time and resources required to manage photos

### Privacy and permissions

Under the "Your Account" option on Flickr, there is a tab for "Privacy & Permissions." It is recommended that agencies set configurations for these options before uploading content to the account. Settings for the following questions need to be decided:

- Who can download your content?
- Who can share your content?

- Who can print your photos?
- Who can blog your content?
- Who will be able to see, comment on, or add notes to your content?
- Who will be able to see your content on a map (if using geotags)?
- Will you hide your EXIF data? – There is a link on all your individual photo pages and it displays the make and model of the camera used to take the shot.
- Will you hide your content and/or profile from public searches?
- Will you make your photos eligible for invitation by Getty Images?
- Will you share your public photos on Yahoo! Updates?

When answering each question, consider the goals of your agency for using Flickr and the resources available to manage the account.

## **Advanced privacy and permissions**

When setting permissions for who can view the account, your agency can limit visibility to only “friends” or “family.” This can allow you to share photos with a select group of Flickr users, including other agencies and employees.

You may want to do this to allow only designated people to make changes to metadata or proofread the descriptions before you make the collection public and expose them to the broader community. However, if you choose to make this content public at a later date, remember that the content will retain the original loading date. This means that your non-friends and family “contacts” may not see this new content in their “Your Contacts” updates when newer content is subsequently loaded. If the content’s visibility was limited for a long time, you may wish to reload the content to get a new date or use a batch date changer tool, such as <http://www.indicommons.org/tools/#batch-date-changer>.

If necessary, it is also possible to send a “guest pass” to someone in order to give permission to view a private photo. The person viewing the photo does not need a Flickr account. For more information on guest passes, visit the Flickr FAQ section at <http://www.flickr.com/help/guestpass/>.

## **Describing your content**

### **Titles**

Titles appear in bold above the photo and should include keywords that describe the content. Flickr uses title as the “h1” tag and html page title on individual content pages

which makes title especially important if you want people to find your photos through search engines. The use of titles is strongly recommended.

The National Archives uses keywords in photo titles, such as this picture of Mrs. Nixon meeting Big Bird from Sesame Street in the White House:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/4077144317/>. The title contains the names of the people, the place, and the date.

## **Descriptions**

Descriptions allow more room to provide rich information about your content and can include basic HTML. The use of descriptions is recommended as they help make your content more available by search.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) makes excellent use of content descriptions, adding stories and context to their photos. They also regularly include links to more information about the subjects of their photos in their descriptions, such as in this photo of a green roof from the EPA Region 8 office building:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usepagov/3901008656/>.

## **Tags**

Tags are short descriptive labels or keywords that a user can add to a photo to make it easier to find later. Some users add tags to describe the subject, location, event, or people in the photo. Up to 75 tags can be added to each image or video. Users can also allow others to add tags to their content.

The Library of Congress has had great success with tags and allowing users to add tags. They only add only one tag to every photo ("Library of Congress") and two machine tags. View all of the other tags that were added by the community at

[http://flickr.com/photos/library\\_of\\_congress/alltags/](http://flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/alltags/).

The use of tags is recommended as they help make your content more available by search. For more information about tags, visit the Flickr Tags FAQ:

<http://www.flickr.com/help/tags/>.

## **Optional enhancements and capabilities**

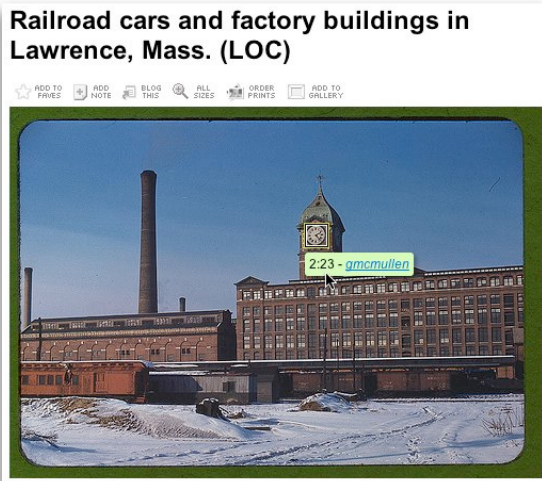
The following features on Flickr can be useful for enhancing the content your agency uploads to Flickr. We recommend using them only if they add value added to your agency's content or further your goals for using Flickr.

## Geo Tags

To “geotag” content on Flickr means to describe where it was created. Geotagging makes it possible for users to easily visualize your agency’s content on a map. Only your agency can geotag your agency’s content.

The EPA has geotagged some of its content which you can see overlaid on a map at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usepagov/map/>. Learn more about geo tags and mapping your photos at the Flickr Map FAQ (<http://www.flickr.com/help/map/>).

## Notes



You can post and allow constituents to post notes on your photos. A note is a brief comment about a selected portion of a photo. In the photo above, a user named “gmcmullen” has added a note to a Library of Congress photo to point out the time on the clock.

Notes are only visible when scrolling over the photo. See the above photo on Flickr ([http://www.flickr.com/photos/library\\_of\\_congress/2178249693/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/2178249693/)).

## People in photos

“People in photos” is a feature that allows any Flickr user to identify other users in photos. Your agency can control which users add people to your photos under the “Who will be able to see, comment on, add notes, or add people” section of “Privacy & Permissions.”

You can also set a rule allowing/disallowing others to tag your agency’s account within their photos. For example, pictures of the Library of Congress buildings have been tagged as “Library\_of\_Congress” with a link to the Library’s photostream. You determine permissions for this activity in the “Who can add you to a photo?” section of your account.



Be aware that allowing others to “add you to a photo” means that those pictures in which your agency is identified (correctly or not) will appear in your agency’s profile page, so if you allow this you may wish to moderate this activity.

Learn more about people in photos at <http://www.flickr.com/help/people/>.

## Organizing your content

Agencies can display “sets” or “collections” of their content on the first page of the photostream. This is a good way to show visitors the kind and depth of images on your agency’s Flickr account.

Organizing photos into sets and collections allows agencies to control the structure of content for users. It is recommended that agencies with pro accounts make use of sets and if desired, collections.

### Sets

A Flickr Set is a grouping of images or videos generally based on an event or theme. Images can be placed in multiple sets. Users with free accounts can create only 3 sets.

The White House creates sets around trips and events. They also created a set to remember Senator Kennedy (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/whitehouse/sets/72157622034521131/>).

### Collections

A Flickr Collection is a grouping of Flickr Sets. For example, an agency could combine sets from all of 2009’s events into a 2009 collection. Sets can be placed into multiple collections.

Users with free accounts cannot create collections.

The U.S. National Archives currently maintains three collections to organize their sets:

- Historical Photographs and Documents (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/collections/72157620415261553/>)
- DOCUMERICA Project by the Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/collections/72157620729903309/>)
- Mathew Brady Civil War Photographs (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/collections/72157622495226723/>)

For more information about Flickr Collections, visit <http://www.flickr.com/help/collections/>.

## **Making your content interactive**

Allowing users to interact with your content on Flickr is a great way to engage constituents, draw attention to your services, and generate goodwill.

Below are some of the easiest ways for your agency to make its content interactive. The extent to which your agency allows others to interact with your content depends in part on the resources available for moderation.

### **Comments**

Flickr gives users the option to allow comments on their photos and videos. This means others can leave messages or feedback directly below the description of your content if you allow it. Comments can contain basic HTML.

It is recommended that agencies allow users to make comments. If your agency is worried about inappropriate comments, work with your agency's lawyers to create a comment policy and post it on your agency's Flickr profile. Note that federal agencies are subject to the First Amendment and cannot delete an on-topic comment simply because it criticizes the agency. Comments can only be deleted if they violate the stated policy. Your agency will also need to determine a schedule and workflow for moderating comments.

More information about privacy and comments is available on Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/help/privacy/>.

### **Groups**

Your agency can join relevant groups in order to increase exposure of your presence and content on Flickr. It is recommended that agencies contribute to groups if the content is relevant and potentially useful to members of the group. For example, the EPA contributes photos to the Environment group on Flickr which is dedicated to "Conservation, protection and restoration of the natural environment": <http://www.flickr.com/groups/environment/>.

Upon joining a group, you can add your content to the group's pool and contribute to group discussion. Users with free accounts can add a photo to up to 10 groups. Those with pro accounts can add content to up to 60 groups. Use Flickr group search (<http://www.flickr.com/search/groups/>) to find groups that would benefit from your content.

Learn more about groups in the Flickr Groups FAQ (<http://www.flickr.com/help/groups/>).

## Tags, notes, and people

As previously mentioned, your agency can control who tags your content and adds notes and people to your photos. Before making a decision about who can tag and add notes to your content, consider the benefits gained against the potential moderation time. For many agencies, the moderation time may not be great, but for some, such as the Library of Congress, the investment may be substantial.

## Flickr Commons

The Flickr Commons (<http://www.flickr.com/commons>), is a designated area of Flickr where cultural heritage institutions share historical photographs that have no known copyright restrictions. The Commons was launched on January 16, 2008, when Flickr started working in partnership with The Library of Congress. The Commons has two main objectives:

- To increase access to publicly-held photography collections; and
- To provide a way for the general public to contribute information and knowledge.

If your agency has content that will enhance the Commons, you can learn more in the Commons FAQ section (<http://www.flickr.com/commons#faq>). Participation in the Commons requires Flickr approval. Request approval to participate at <http://www.flickr.com/commons/register/>.

## Intellectual property

Every photo on Flickr displays a rights statement indicating the copyright status of the image or video. This statement can be applied to all photos or each photo individually. Before choosing a status, determine the copyright status of the content your agency plans to post and how others can use it. Consult with legal counsel if you are not sure of the status of your agency's work.

### All rights reserved

This is the default statement applied by Flickr and is the most restrictive. See [copyright.gov](http://copyright.gov) for more information about copyright law.

### Creative Commons licenses

There are six main Creative Commons licenses that give permissions to use copyrighted content, such as the rights to use the work, share the work, or make money from the work.

If you are not familiar with Creative Commons, read *Before Licensing* ([http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Before\\_Licensing](http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Before_Licensing)) and review the Creative Commons FAQs ([http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Frequently\\_Asked\\_Questions](http://wiki.creativecommons.org/Frequently_Asked_Questions)). Conversations are still ongoing about the propriety of Creative Commons licenses for the government.

## **United States Government Work**

Photographs taken by federal employees in the scope of their employment are “U.S. Government works” that are not subject to copyright inside the United States. Agencies have worked with Flickr to create a United States Government Work option, which is appropriate for works developed by federal employees in the scope of their employment. It may not be appropriate for contractor or other works developed for the government, depending on what rights are set in the contract. Using this statement requires a manual workaround on Flickr’s part, so it can only be applied by contacting them directly at [flickr-gov@yahoo-inc.com](mailto:flickr-gov@yahoo-inc.com). Because the use of this tag may be subject to delay, Flickr recommends that you assign an interim nonrestrictive Creative Commons tag such as “cc by” to your content. If you assign a Creative Commons license, best practice is to note in the description of your collection if it is comprised of U.S. Government Works. You can link to USA.gov for a description: <http://www.usa.gov/copyright.shtml>.

## **No known copyright restrictions**

The use of this rights statement is limited to photos in The Commons. For more information about this determination and a list of members of the The Commons, visit <http://www.flickr.com/commons/usage/>.

## **Measuring success**

Think broadly when choosing how to evaluate your agency’s use of Flickr. As with all social media or community building initiatives, keep your long-term impact in mind when defining success. Actively using Flickr can yield powerful rewards over time, such as creating goodwill, generating awareness of your services, and developing a deeper understanding of your audience.

## **Metrics**

Flickr provides statistics about view counts and referrers to users with pro accounts. These statistics can be viewed by clicking on the graph that appears on the Flickr home page when you are logged in. Flickr provides a graph of daily aggregate views on your account that tracks data for 28 days. Mousing over a date on the graph will give you the number of views, comments and favorites for that day. Clicking a date on the graph will give detailed information about traffic on your account for that day and view counts for photos and videos, photostreams, sets, and collections by today, yesterday, and all

time. Flickr also breaks out the most viewed photos and referrers for today and yesterday.

If maintaining statistics over time is important to you, then you might want to explore some of Flickr's APIs. You can view a list of Flickr's stats APIs at <http://www.flickr.com/services/api/#api-stats>. Note that Flickr's only keeps detailed data for 28 days. If you want to keep long term statistics, they will have to be captured and maintained manually.

You may wish to use tools beyond Flickr to track usage. You can set up personal email alerts or use RSS to alert you when your Flickr content is used in other forums. If you search for the link to your Flickr photos on Google Blog search, you'll get results for where others are using your images. From there, you can subscribe to an RSS feed or email updates for this search.

To see an example, visit <http://blogsearch.google.com/blogsearch?hl=en&ie=UTF-8&q=link:http://flickr.com/photos/whitehouse&btnG=Search+Blogs>. This link is for a search on the url to the White House's Flickr photos. Flickr does provide RSS feeds for everyone's photostream, group and forum discussions, and specific tags. For more information on RSS, visit "How To Get The Most Out of Flickr" ([http://www.flickr.com/get\\_the\\_most\\_out\\_of\\_flickr#rss](http://www.flickr.com/get_the_most_out_of_flickr#rss)).

## Performance indicators

Identifying performance indicators on Flickr will depend on how your agency uses Flickr and how you define goals for your agency or program. Indications of success on Flickr could include:

- View counts for your agency's content
- Number of Flickr members that have made you a contact
- Number of photos that have been marked as a favorite
- Number and type of referrers
- Number and type of comments, tags, and notes added to content
- Number and type of group interactions
- Number of times someone else uses your content, if allowed
- Interactions with others after using their content
- Increased traffic to related content on your dotgov website

## Examples of effective government use of Flickr

### Library of Congress

The Library of Congress is an example of a federal institution with a clear mission to archive, organize, and share photographic content. The Library of Congress uses Flickr Commons to increase public awareness of their collections and to add value to descriptions of historical photos by inviting the Flickr community to add tags and comments. Browse their photos at [http://www.flickr.com/photos/library\\_of\\_congress/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/). Read about their experience in the report “For the Common Good: The Library of Congress Flickr Pilot Project” at [http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/flickr\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/flickr_report_final.pdf). A summary is available at [http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/flickr\\_report\\_final\\_summary.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/flickr_report_final_summary.pdf).

### U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The EPA uses Flickr to engage citizens and raise awareness of its mission by inviting them to share photos in Flickr groups. This is a way for the EPA to interact with Flickr without having its own original content. For Earth Day 2009, the EPA invited Flickr users to join their “EPA Earth Day 2009 photo project” Flickr group and share photos that “show EPA’s mission to protect human health and the environment.” Browse the photos shared by citizens at [http://www.flickr.com/groups/epa\\_2009\\_people-and-environment/pool/](http://www.flickr.com/groups/epa_2009_people-and-environment/pool/).

### The White House

The White House uses Flickr to make official photographs available for publication by news organizations and/or for personal use printing by the subject(s) of the photographs. High quality (3500×2333) images can be viewed and downloaded. The photostream also makes the activities of the President visible to the public. Photos are organized into sets by month, major trips, images of the First Lady, and first 100 days in office. Browse the photostream at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/whitehouse/>.

## How to get help with Flickr

If your agency has questions about or needs help setting up or maintaining a Flickr account, join the Flickr Gov group at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/flickrgov/>.

Questions about the Flickr Terms of Service agreement should be directed to Mike Ettner ([michael.ettner@gsa.gov](mailto:michael.ettner@gsa.gov)), GSA and Hope O’Keeffe ([loke@loc.gov](mailto:loke@loc.gov)), Library of Congress. Other questions about Flickr can be sent to [flickr-gov@yahoo-inc.com](mailto:flickr-gov@yahoo-inc.com).